

Pacific Islands Assistantship
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Project Plan for Hilary Stevens
Updated April 20, 2004

Introduction

The Coastal Resources Management Office (CRMO) is charged with regulating and permitting all activities within the coastal zone of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). It has responsibility to permit development in the coastal zone and enforcement authority over those permits. Its regulations include Areas of Particular Concern, which define sensitive regions that require higher levels of protection from development or misuse. Additionally, the office monitors coastal regions and works in conjunction with other agencies to protect the CNMI natural resources.

The technical assistant, referred to within CRMO as the natural resources specialist, is a NOAA supported position designed to build capacity in the CNMI. The assistant acts as a planner and trainer in the office. The assistant works closely with the natural resources planner to manage programs regarding planning, regulatory updates, and inter-agency collaboration. Additionally, the assistant will attend numerous workshops and conferences to connect the CNMI with regional peers and global specialists in coastal management.

As a member of the CRMO and participant in various office projects, the assistant will attend meetings to build working relationships and foster cooperation among all natural resource agencies. The assistant will interact with the public at symposiums and forums to ensure support for CRMO projects. This role of representative extends to participation in regional and field-specific conferences beyond the CNMI as well.

List of Projects

1. Updating the Areas of Particular Concern
2. Managing Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan and other planning programs
3. Evaluating Regulations

Project Descriptions.

Project 1

CRMO permitting is based on the concept of Areas of Particular Concern (APC). The current regulations state that these are geographically delineated areas. They include wetlands and mangroves, port and industrial areas, reefs and lagoons, coastal hazard zones, and shoreline areas. With the exception of Federal Emergency Management Area coastal hazard areas, these APCs are not currently defined in great detail. They are roughly outlined by GIS layers, and used on a discretionary basis. Very little metadata exists for the GIS layers. The assistant will update the GIS layers and the regulations that govern their use. These two aspects of the permitting process are interlinked, and the process of updating them will therefore be simultaneous.

The wetlands APC is currently in the process of being updated. Because wetlands shift over

time, this APC is particularly susceptible to change. The assistant will gather all available data regarding the wetlands, and use them to create a new GIS later under guidance of NOAA staff. The assistant will also interview office personnel and other experts regarding the regulations and recommend revisions to make them more in line with current practices and goals. Once the wetlands regulations and maps are completed, the specialist will proceed to update the next APC.

The recent reinstatement of the zoning code in the CNMI has raised the possibility of drastic changes in permitting. The assistant will work with the CRMO and its legal council to ensure that regulations remain valid and effective.

Project 1	Areas of Particular Concern
Activity	Groundtruth the current wetlands map. Update the GIS. Ensure consistency with regulations.
Deliverable(s)	Comparison of current map with field data. New GIS layers. Updated regulations.
Date	New wetlands layer will be completed in Charleston, May 26. Timelines for other APCs TBD.

Project Summary

The final goals of this project are current and accurate wetland regulations and GIS maps of the APCs. The data will be clear and easy to update. The regulations will include a plan for regularly updating APCs from data in permit surveys and field work. The regulations will reflect the changes that have resulted from the reinstatement of the zoning code, as well as other modifications to improve office efficiency and efficacy.

Project 2

The Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan is a NOAA initiative to provide matching funds for acquisition of sensitive coastal and estuarine areas. The assistant is working with the inter-agency Watershed Working Group to define priority areas for conservation. The assistant will continue to work with other agencies to outline plans for land acquisition and submit a final plan to NOAA.

Project 2	CELCP
Activity	Research options for land acquisition. Gather public opinions. Develop working relationships with relevant agencies. Write plan for submission to NOAA. Pursue matching funding for project.
Deliverable(s)	List of priorities for land selection. Draft plan to circulate and discuss with partner agencies. Final plan to NOAA. Match funding for nominated parcel(s).
Date	Priorities will be set by May. Land acquisition arrangements will be agreed upon by July. The plan will be completed by Sept.

Project Summary

The CELCP represents an opportunity for the CNMI to take a proactive role in conserving its most valuable and sensitive areas. Integrating other agencies and public opinion into the process will ensure support for the project and long-term viability. The drafting process of the project is a chance to explore options and set priorities. The plan itself will serve as a means of gaining Federal support and funding for the project.

Project 3

The CRM regulations are undergoing an internal review process. The Board recently passed a series of minor amendments, and the staff are currently in the process of suggesting more substantial changes. The assistant will take part in the review of the regulations to ensure that they are up to date with current office protocol and other relevant regulations. This process is expected to proceed by section through the regulations, beginning with wetlands to coincide with the APC updates.

Additionally, the assistant will review the zoning regulations and be prepared to advise the director regarding conflicts and overlaps with current policies. It is expected that the zoning code will be amended soon after a Development Advisory Council is appointed. The assistant will remain aware of any amendments, and react accordingly to any impacts this process might have on the CRM regulations.

In the event that the zoning code does not go into effect, the assistant will be prepared to commence work on a comprehensive land use plan. This plan will evolve under close supervision from the Director and Governor to ensure it has political support.

Project 3	Evaluating Regulations
Activity	Incorporate current suggestions as amendments. Conduct staff meetings to discuss changes. Prepare amended regulations. Compare current regulations to zoning code.
Deliverable(s)	Staff suggestions. Final draft of amended regulations to submit to the Board for approval.
Date	Zoning/regulations comparison ready in May. Amended regulations for wetlands ready in December.

Project Summary

The process of evaluating the regulations will doubtless provoke discussions about the role of the CRM office and current practices. Those conversations should give the directors some guidance regarding long term planning. The final outcome of this project is a set of regulations that clearly outlines the roles of the office and guides the office personnel.

That final outcome can also be applied in the case that the zoning code or a new land use plan is established. The CRM office will require a set of clear regulations that reflect its amended responsibilities.

Professional Development Allowance

Travel Events and Cost:

Event (including location)	Dates	Estimated Cost
Tinian Wetlands Trip	March 29-30, 2004	\$150
Technical Training in Charleston, SC	May 8-14, 2004	~\$2500
Coastal Society Conference, Newport, RI	May 23-26, 2004	~\$2000
All Islands Management Meeting in Saipan, CNMI	June 16-18, 2004	\$0
ESRI User's Group Conference	August 9-13, 2004	~\$2500
CZAP '04, Brisbane, AU	Sept 5-9, 2004	~\$3000
GeoTools '05 in Myrtle Beach, SC	March 2005	~\$2500
All Islands Management Meeting - TBD	Summer 2005	TBD

Additional Costs:

N/A

Approval

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Joaquin Salas

Island Manager(s)

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